

What is claimed is:

1. A service element,  
wherein the service element (2, 15, 16) is a component of a distributed system, the components of the distributed system being independent of one another and interconnected by a bus (1, 8, 14), and the service element (2, 15, 16) configures, equips, and maintains other components of the distributed system and, if necessary, carries out an emergency function.
2. The service element as recited in Claim 1,  
wherein the service element (2, 15, 16) detects new components and integrates them into the system, or the service element (2, 15, 16) represents information about a configuration, using a display (7, 22, 24).
3. The service element as recited in Claim 2,  
wherein the service element (2, 15, 16) carries out an error diagnosis of software running on the other components, and, in the case of an error, corrects the software within the framework of maintenance.
4. The service element as recited in Claim 3,  
wherein the service element (2, 15, 16) loads new software for the components, using communication means (4, 23, 25).
5. The service element as recited in Claim 4,  
wherein the service element (2, 15, 16) allows a remote diagnosis of components of the distributed system.
6. The service element as recited in Claim 5,  
wherein, in the case of a serious functional error, the service element (2, 3, 15) contacts a service provider, using the communication means (4, 23, 25).
7. The service element as recited in one of the preceding claims,  
wherein the service element transfers to a user of the distributed system, using the

display (7, 22, 24), the distributed system having the display (7, 22, 24) to the user as a component, which transfers information about the entire system to him or her.

8. The service element as recited in one of the preceding claims, wherein the service element (2, 15, 16) checks newly loaded software, using predetermined values.
9. A distributed system, the distributed system having components independent of each other, and the components being connected by a bus (1, 8, 14), wherein a service element (2, 15, 16) is a component of the distributed system, and the service element (2, 15, 16) configures, equips, and maintains other components of the distributed system and, if necessary, carries out an emergency function.
10. The distributed system as recited in Claim 9, wherein at least one component of the distributed system has communication means (4, 23, 25).